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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

399th Meeting
Thursday, 9 June 1994, 3 p.m.
Vienna

Chairman: Mr. Hohenfellner . . . . . (Austria)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Attendance by non-members of the Committee

The Chairman: I should like to inform members that I have received a note verbale from Panama in which it requests permission to attend the current session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space as an observer. I therefore suggest that, in conformity with past practice, we invite that delegation to attend the current session and to address the Committee as appropriate. This is, of course, without prejudice to further requests of this nature and does not involve any decision by the Committee concerning status. It is a courtesy we customarily extend to delegations. If there is no objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

Organization of work

The Chairman: Later at this meeting, we will continue our joint consideration of agenda item 5, "Report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee" and agenda item 7, "Implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82". I urge all delegations wishing to speak on these agenda items to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

I would remind representatives that, as I proposed in my opening statement, the matter of the third UNISPACE conference is being considered by the Committee under item 5, "Report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee", and that delegations wishing to speak on this important subject should do so under agenda item 5. We will be continuing our consideration of this item tomorrow morning and, if necessary, on Monday.

I would also remind representatives that tomorrow morning there will be a meeting of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries at 9 a.m. in Conference Room 7 and that tomorrow afternoon we will conduct an informal meeting of the Committee to discuss matters related to the working methods of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies, in accordance with the requests of several delegations.

Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes *(continued)*

Mr. Wiryusumarto (Indonesia): With regard to the item under consideration, my delegation would like to recall that the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/39 of 10 December 1993, paragraph 37, requested the Committee

> "to continue to consider, as a matter of priority, ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes".

My delegation is of the view that the General Assembly's request shows the concern felt by the international community on the need to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, taking into consideration the needs of developing countries. Accordingly, outer space should therefore be used entirely for peaceful purposes and for the welfare of mankind. The Committee, through its work in the scientific, technical and legal fields, should continue its role in ensuring that outer space is maintained for peaceful purposes.

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My delegation shares the views of previous speakers that a good way to broaden and deepen international cooperation in outer space is through international and regional programmes undertaken as part of international and regional endeavours. In order to achieve this goal, the Committee should complement and contribute to the work being done in the Conference on Disarmament, particularly on questions relating to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, while considering that the peaceful and non-peaceful uses of outer space are inseparably linked.

In this respect, the Indonesian delegation feels that the process of exchange of information between the Conference on Disarmament and this Committee, particularly concerning the non-military use of outer space, could be immediately implemented. In order to strengthen the cooperation between these two bodies, my delegation would like to urge the Committee to include in its discussions on this aspect an examination of the possibility of establishing a working contact between them, including a mechanism through institutionalization of dialogue. The rationale behind this idea is to keep the Committee well informed of the progress made by the Conference on such questions.

As we all are aware, outer space is the common heritage of mankind, and it should be explored and utilized exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit and in the interest of all mankind. My delegation would like to reiterate its strong support for the view that international standards should be elaborated to ensure the widest possible access to space resources and technology. In this regard, discrepancies in the enjoyment of the benefits of outer space could be curtailed if a legal framework designed to facilitate and guarantee international cooperation and interdependence is well laid out and adhered to.

The Chairman: We have concluded our consideration of agenda item 4.

Report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the work of its thirty-first session (A/AC.105/571) *(continued)*

Implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space *(continued)*

Mr. Zaman (Pakistan): My delegation would like to express its satisfaction at the progress made by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee during its thirty-first session. The United Nations Programme on Space Applications, carried out by the Office for Outer Space Affairs, has been making efforts not only to cope with its mandate but also to enhance its scope of activities in the light of the UNISPACE 82 recommendations within the meagre financial resources available to it.

My delegation would like to express its appreciation to the various Member States and the specialized agencies that are providing in-kind or cash support for continuing Programme activities. Recognizing the inadequacy of the financial resources made available over the years to the Programme under the regular budget of the United Nations, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space at its last session recommended increasing the regular budget allocation for the Programme. That recommendation was endorsed by the General Assembly, which approved an additional budget allocation for the 1994-1995 biennium. This additional allocation is recognized and appreciated. Although this increase is still not adequate, it is better to have something than nothing. Our Committee should continue to make efforts to get the allocations adequately enhanced to meet the actual requirements of the Programme.

We are all aware of the immense benefits that have accrued to many countries as a result of the recommendations adopted by the UNISPACE 82 Conference, held in August 1982 in Vienna. Since then, more than a decade has passed and many more advances have been made in space technology and its applications, and the situation now obtaining justifies the holding of a third UNISPACE conference under the aegis of the United Nations. A paper offering suggestions on how to organize UNISPACE 3 was proposed by the Group of 77 countries and submitted to the Subcommittee. My delegation would suggest that those elements be discussed in detail by our Committee in order to arrive at an early conclusion on the matter. In this connection, the report prepared by the Secretariat, which is a very useful document, is also highly appreciated owing to its relevance. It also should be made use of while discussing the holding of UNISPACE 3.

Concerning the establishment of United Nations Regional Centres for Space Science and Technology Education to develop indigenous capabilities, the United Nations Expert on Space Applications provided, during the morning session, detailed information on the progress achieved so far. It may be pointed out that information provided in document A/AC.105/534, prepared by the United Nations Expert, contains, *inter alia*, the revised estimate of the budgets for setting up such Centres in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia.

It is noteworthy that while the budgetary figure given by the United Nations Expert in 1991 for the establishment of each Centre was $4.87 million, with an implementation period of four years, the budget estimates given in the revised document are around $6.5 million for such a Centre with an implementation period of five years. Evidently, with the passage of time, the overall cost of establishing such Centres is increasing, and it might become very difficult for the potential host countries in each economic region to co-sponsor these Centres without the much-needed external financial support. In this connection, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs should make every effort to arrive at a final and agreeable decision in consultation with the potential host countries in each region as soon as possible.

On the question of revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, my delegation welcomes the various studies and presentations made by the Member States, which provided in-depth ideas and research on the various aspects of the questions at issue. These will certainly assist the Subcommittee in evolving ways and means of revising those Principles to the satisfaction of all concerned, if so required. It is important that such studies on this subject be continued, as this would help facilitate the process of revision of those Principles.

Concerning the item on space debris, my delegation would express its appreciation for the scientific and technical presentations made at the thirty-fourth session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the various aspects of space debris. As noted in its report, the Subcommittee will, it is hoped, develop a continuing and specific multi-year plan to study in detail the various elements involved. My delegation also supports other representatives' suggestions to fix a time period for achieving the desired results.

My delegation would like to place on record its appreciation for the two world bodies, namely, the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF), for organizing, on an annual basis, the symposia on various themes at the annual sessions of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. During those symposia, many illustrative technical presentations were made on state-of-the-art developments in and applications of space science and technology. We hope that, in keeping with their past record, the COSPAR and IAF will continue to arrange for more such presentations in the future, in view of their immense usefulness to the world's scientific community.

Mr. Fulda (Germany): The focal point of this year's session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee was undoubtedly the taking up of the question of space debris as a separate agenda item. For quite a long time my delegation had advocated this move. We are very satisfied that it is now possible to deal with this ever-growing problem of space flight.

The first round of discussions on space debris was successful, as it was possible to acquaint the Subcommittee with the scope of the technical aspects and problems involved. We have proposed that, after this first step of a general *tour d'horizon*, the Subcommittee should structure the discussions of the subject. To our great satisfaction, this proposal is now reflected in the report of the Subcommittee, which says

> "at its next meeting it should develop a continuing, deliberate, specific multi-year plan for its work on that agenda item". *(A/AC.105/571, para. 71)*

The German delegation will constructively participate in drafting this work plan and in providing information on the topics concerned. As a result of this process, we expect consensus to be reached on the technical characteristics of space debris and on ways and means of effectively dealing with this problem.

Germany has during the last year actively supported space applications programmes prepared by you, Mr. Chairman, and the Office for Outer Space Affairs. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Office once more and, in particular, the Expert on Space Applications, Mr. Abiodun, for the remarkable work being done in that field.

The German space agency, DARA, has become co-sponsor of the United Nations-European Space Agency workshops on basic space science. In order to provide further detailed information on German space activities to Member States, the German delegation has submitted two reports: "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space: activities of Member States", in document A/AC.105/567/Add.3, of 23 February 1994, and "National research on space debris", in document A/AC.105/565/Add.2, of 23 February 1994.

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee discussed several aspects of the possible convening of a third UNISPACE conference. At the main Committee's meeting last year, some discussions had already been devoted to this issue. These deliberations eventually led to General

Assembly resolution 48/39, of 10 December 1993, which contains a twofold approach. First, it recommends a thorough analysis of the possible objectives and organizational details of such a conference. Secondly, it notes that the goals set for such a conference might be achieved by other means, including intensification of work within this Committee.

I thank the secretariat for presenting a report dealing with the first of these mandates. I hope that our Committee will ask the secretariat to prepare a similar report for our next meeting, concentrating on the second question - that is, to analyse ways and means of achieving the same goals without convening a special conference. Only on the basis of such a comparative examination will this Committee be well prepared to decide upon the most adequate steps to be taken.

Let me briefly express some first reactions to the report of the secretariat contained in document A/AC.105/575. Unfortunately, this document was distributed to capitals only recently, which prevents my sharing with the Committee any views elaborated after examination by all the competent authorities in my country. I may state, however, that it contains several interesting ideas, particularly with regard to international cooperation on making use of earth observation data. We have so far dealt with these problems when talking about space benefits. It is my impression that progress in this field could pave the way for a fruitful international conference. We have to maintain our position that any conference assembling Ministers and high-ranking specialists needs careful preparation, which has to be pursued on the basis of an agenda adopted by consensus. Having this in mind, we should avoid rushing into too ambitious a timetable.

Mr. Fiuza Neto (Brazil): With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I intend to touch briefly upon some of the principal aspects of the thirty-first session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, held earlier this year.

The Brazilian delegation was heartened by the fact that for the first time the Subcommittee had on its agenda, as a separate item, the question of space debris. The initiation of formal discussions on this urgent matter within COPUOS was long overdue and was thus all the more welcome. In our view, the highly informative technical presentations made on this subject, which elicited a significant response from many delegations, warrant targeting space debris for consideration on a priority basis, beginning at the thirty-second session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

That proposal stems from our understanding that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee was established with the basic objective of supplying the Legal Subcommittee - which constitutes the heart and soul of COPUOS - with updated and precise scientific information to assist Member States in the process of elaborating international legislation with regard to outer space. However, in recent years the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee has somewhat lost touch with its original mandate. Therefore, the consideration of space debris on a priority basis, so as to establish the convenience of taking up the matter also in the Legal Subcommittee, would seem to be appropriate.

In this regard, Brazil fully supports the view expressed by the delegation of the Netherlands that a deadline should be set for the conclusion of discussions on this item in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, and that a report should be prepared as an input for political debate in the Committee.

My delegation took note with great satisfaction of the statement made by the delegation of the United States of America to the effect that the Principles on nuclear power sources were consistent with American practice in this area and that, as a consequence, a revision would not be sought at this stage. Brazil fully agrees that such a step is not needed at the present time, though nuclear power sources should continue to be discussed in the Subcommittee with a view to following developments in the scientific and technical field. It would appear, however, that some of the considerable energy which has been geared towards this subject in recent years could perhaps now be diverted to other more pressing items, particularly that on space debris.

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee also debated the possible convening of a third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. During the session, documents were presented on the subject by the Indian and Pakistani delegations, and working paper A/AC.105/C.1/L.199 was drafted by the Group of 77. It is the opinion of my delegation that these texts provide an adequate basis for initiating a structured discussion on the subject during the present session.

We have, in recent deliberations on a third UNISPACE conference, heard statements to the effect that the proponents of such an event need to present convincing evidence of the real necessity for such an initiative. However, it seems to the Brazilian delegation, which in principle favours the convening of a third UNISPACE conference, that unless existing doubts regarding the holding of such a conference are detailed it will be difficult

to establish what would actually constitute a convincing piece of evidence.

The recently released report (A/AC.105/575) of the secretariat entitled "Matters related to the possible holding of a third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space", provides us with a great deal of food for thought and tackles with efficiency questions such as organization, logistics and funding. Together with the documents to which I referred earlier, it represents an important contribution to our discussions.

Turning now to the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 2, the Brazilian delegation would like to express its regret that the resources available for carrying out the Programme on Space Applications remain scarce. Therefore, the Programme continues to rely heavily on voluntary contributions from Member States. The announcement made by Austria on Tuesday to the effect that it would be donating $20,000 to that end was an excellent example of how to overcome the problem.

Brazil, for its part, is honoured to contribute to the Programme through the offer of training fellowships for in-depth training in various areas relating to space activities. Our long-standing commitment to the Programme enables us to call on Member States in a position to do so to continue to lend their support to the Programme.

Mr. Sakss (United States of America): It is my pleasure to make a few remarks on the accomplishments of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, which met in February. The Subcommittee's session was productive, covering a broad spectrum of international space activities and issues, ranging from remote sensing of the Earth by satellite to space debris. My delegation was grateful for the opportunity to hear other delegations highlight their accomplishments in space in the last year. We also appreciated the opportunity to review for the Subcommittee some of our key activities.

As we noted during the Subcommittee session, 1993 was another busy year for NASA's international activities. Astronauts from Germany and Switzerland flew on Space Shuttle missions last year. These missions included payloads and experiments that involved researchers and science teams from around the world. The Hubble Space Telescope servicing mission was successfully completed in December 1993; the astronauts, including one from the European Space Agency (ESA), completed all 11 servicing tasks. The Space Station was redesigned and, in December 1993, Russia accepted an invitation to join the United States, Canada, Japan and nine members of the European Space Agency in participating in this international endeavour.

The Subcommittee also addressed such scientific and technical issues as international cooperation in orbital debris, the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space and a third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Let me briefly outline my delegation's views on these important matters.

On the subject of orbital debris, my delegation joined consensus in the Subcommittee in committing, for the next session, to develop a continuing, deliberate, specific multi-year work plan for the Subcommittee's work on this agenda item, including focusing on the subject of acquisition and understanding of data on the characteristics of the orbital-debris environment, with a view to establishing a common understanding that could serve as a basis for further deliberations. The United States continues to believe that it is not appropriate, at this time, to move the discussion of orbital debris into the Legal Subcommittee or to develop recommendations in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to underpin new legal norms for orbital debris. An adequate discussion of the scientific research in the field must be accomplished and an adequate base of knowledge must be established within the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee before we consider whether new legal norms should be developed.

My delegation also supports the Subcommittee's report language in which references to orbital debris contained in consensus paragraphs properly characterize the issue and set forth a rational process to address it. As requested of Member States by the Subcommittee, the United States intends to submit information on practices we have adopted that have proved effective in minimizing the creation of orbital debris.

The subject of safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space continues to be of interest to the United States, particularly for space missions where other power sources would not be enabling. Based on a review of our position on the Principles on the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space, the United States does not seek specific changes to the Principles at this time.

Finally, regarding holding a third UNISPACE, we appreciate the work done by the secretariat in preparing its report (A/AC.105/575) on the financial and administrative implications of holding the conference. The United States shares the view that the significant changes in the

international scene that have occurred since UNISPACE 82 provide a real opportunity to deepen and broaden international cooperation in space. Therefore, we are prepared to consider detailed proposals concerning the agenda, the venue, financial implications and administrative aspects of a third conference. At that point we would be in a position to move toward a final decision on convening such a conference.

The Chairman: I want to take this opportunity once again to urge delegations to make full use of our conference facilities by adding their names to the list of speakers on the various items before the Committee as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.